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SUBJECT: PETRAEUS DISCUSSES MASHADANI, SYRIA, WITH VP  
HASHIMI

Classified By: Amb Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (S) SUMMARY: The replacement for Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani, GCC relations generally and Syrian relations specifically, and concerns about Saudi relations were topics of conversation in a December 26 meeting between US Central Command General David Petraeus and Vice President Tariq al Hashimi. Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker accompanied the general and Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) CoR member Osama al Tikriti was also present. While Hashimi was not forthcoming on a possible replacement for Mashadani, he was insistent that the new speaker would come from Tawafuq. Moreover, while Hashimi indicated his pleasure with his recent travel to Syria, Turkey and Lebanon, he indicated some concerns with Syrian sponsorship of Iraqi insurgent and terrorist groups. He also noted that Syrians were awaiting a goodwill gesture from Iraq before relations could improve, although Iraqi leadership was hesitant to act, perhaps because of the insurgent elements in Syria. Finally, Hashimi relayed that the Saudis were unhappy with his signing the US-Iraq security agreement, but offered no details as to why they were displeased. END SUMMARY.

[12](#). (C) General Petraeus expressed America's continued commitment to Iraq and noted the gains in the Iraqi Security Forces' professional and institutional capacity. Although conceding that challenges remained (such as the need for oil production and servicing contracts and for further security improvements), Petraeus emphasized the substantial progress Iraq and the US had achieved together. Petraeus also stressed the importance of the government of Iraq (GOI) maintaining momentum of its current programs despite the fact that falling oil prices would create budget challenges for the GOI and might require the GOI resorting to deficit spending. Hashimi acknowledged American contributions and sacrifices, and the work still to be done. And, while he allowed that there might be financial difficulties, he remained noncommittal as to solutions.

Mashadani  
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[13](#). (C) As for the recently ousted CoR speaker, the Iraqis agreed that the speaker's problems were of his own making. Hashimi observed that there were many conspiracy theories extant about why Mashadani had been ousted, and whether such actions would be extended to Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki. When queried about the next speaker, Hashimi averred that it was Tawafuq's right to put forward a Sunni candidate -- this had been agreed to by the Kurds and ISCI -- but claimed that Hewan was interfering and trying to name its own candidate. While Hashimi allowed that negotiations were ongoing, he claimed Hewan did not have enough votes to elect their own candidate.

[14](#). (C) When pushed to identify a short list, Hashimi claimed secrecy and jested that the Americans knew the short list anyway. Osama al Tikriti threw out the name of Hachem al Hassani, a Sunni independent, but Hashimi countered that, as

an independent, Hassani had no support to draw on. Despite several probes, Hashimi remained reticent to name a candidate, Tawafuq or otherwise. As Hashimi remained intransigent in identifying possible candidates, both Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus stressed that the next leader must be someone with stature and able to lead; it should not be a choice based on the least common denominator or on conspiracies.

#### GCC Relations

15. (C) Petraeus raised the issue of Iraq's Arab relations, noting that he was more than half-way through a 20-country tour encompassing all of the countries that fell under the US Qtour encompassing all of the countries that fell under the US Central Command (CENTCOM). Gen. Petraeus announced his pleasure at being able to report Iraqi progress to the Arab leaders and that all were focused on the geo-strategic importance of Iraq. He noted to Hashimi that the reports had been very encouraging to Iraq,s Arab neighbors.

#### Syrian Relations

16. (S) After Crocker noted Hashimi's recent travel to Turkey, Lebanon and Syria, Hashimi shared details on his meeting with Syrian President Bashar al Assad. Hashimi claimed the Syrians were interested in changing their course, and wanted a positive economic gesture from Iraq; e.g. some agreement on a Banyas oil pipeline or the Akal natural gas field. Unfortunately, Iraqi leaders were still hesitant. Hashimi said he would try to push some positive gesture through the

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Iraqi Presidency Council (PC), but such a move also required Syrian action against insurgent activities and terrorist networks operating from that country.

17. (S) Petraeus observed that Iraqi hesitation was not helped by the openly allowed presence of al Qaeda facilitators and former Saddamists in Syria. Hashimi claimed he had made this point to Assad; many Iraqis viewed Syria as accommodating al Qaeda and former Saddamists. Although Tikriti hypothesized that Syria's activities were Iran-linked, Hashemi offered that Assad said the Syrians were not coordinating their activities in Iraq with Iran. The Syrians, Hashimi opined, would not sacrifice their Arab identity, although he thought the Syrian views on Hamas in Lebanon were different. Hashimi stated that he told Assad that if he continued the Iraqis will dig a big trench between Iraq and Syria. Petraeus stressed that Syria needs to emphasize Arab ties because Iran couldn't provide the level of economic support Syria needs; only the Gulf States, Iraq, the Arab world, and Europe could do that. Petraeus emphasized that Assad knew about al Qaeda foreign fighter facilitator Abu Ghadiyah and his activities, and Syrian Military Intelligence allowed Ghadiyah to continue as long as the fighters and suicide bombers continued on into Iraq. Ghadiyah,s successors, he noted, were already getting established. He added that the Syrian regime should be very concerned about such deals with extremists, citing the situation the Pakistani government currently faced with extremists they had condoned.

#### Spillover Conspiracies?

18. (C) Tikriti noted that Maliki was also worried about the presence of Ba'athists and former Saddamists in Syria, again linking Mashadani's ouster to a possible Maliki ouster. Petraeus noted that it was hard to say if Ba,athists still provided money to Iraq insurgents; he noted that Hashimi should have enmity and no sympathy for the Iraqi Baathist leaders in Syria, as they were true Saddamists like those who undoubtedly killed his brother. Tikriti's comment introduced the topic of the Dokan meeting at the end of November, and

how it had only increased Maliki's suspicions. Hashimi insisted, however, that Maliki had been invited to join in and that there had been nothing underhanded in the meeting.

¶9. (C) As the US team attempted to learn more, Hashimi -- somewhat abruptly -- signaled a close to the meeting by extending his thanks for the work and sacrifices of the coalition and expressing concerns that the ISF must be both competent and capable. This was necessary to prevent a security vacuum. The security partnership between the US and Iraq must continue. Petraeus assured Hashimi on both counts and offered to have Lieutenant General Frank Helmick from MNSTC-I provide an updated briefing on the steady progression in capability of the ISF, with a great deal of focus on ethics, professionalism, and building a national force.

Saudi Concerns?

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¶10. (S) As the meeting concluded, Hashimi indicated he would be leaving on Sunday (December 28) for Kuwait, with onward travel to Bahrain and the UAE. While both sides agreed on the importance of maintaining good GCC relations, Hashimi introduced an issue with the Saudis. He asserted they were unhappy with his signing of the security agreement and had received a very negative response from them. Petraeus reassured Hashimi of the positive responses he had obtained from the Saudis during his recent trip concerning the security agreement. Crocker sought clarification as to whether the negative message was about the security agreement, or an excuse to create an issue. The Ambassador also pointed out the Saudi government was extremely complex, and that it may not have been a message from the Saudi government per se, although Hashimi insisted it was from allies close to the king. The Americans promised to look into the situation for clarification. (Note: Amb Crocker and GEN Petraeus suspect that the Saudis were not unsupportive of the security agreement -- as they want to see the US stay in Iraq; rather, they likely have decided to back parties other than the IIP in the provincial elections. End Note.)

¶11. (U) General Petraeus has cleared on this cable.  
CROCKER